

NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5511
CLAUDIO ESKENAZI

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CHAD AND LIBYA

ANNCR:

AS THE ETHIOPIAN-SOMALI CLASH OVER THE OGADEN AREA INTENSIFIES IN EAST AFRICA, ANOTHER TROUBLE SPOT -- THE CENTRAL AFRICAN COUNTRY OF CHAD -- HAS BEEN GETTING INCREASING ATTENTION. VOA'S CLAUDIO ESKENAZI HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT.

NARR:

CHAD IS ONE OF THE LARGEST AND LEAST KNOWN COUNTRIES IN AFRICA LOCATED IN THE HEART OF THE DARK CONTINENT, IT WAS ONCE PART OF FRENCH EQUATORIAL AFRICA. CHAD IS ONE OF THE POOREST AND LEAST DEVELOPED NATIONS IN THE WORLD. ITS POPULATION IS ENGAGED PRIMARILY IN SUBSISTENCE AGRICULTURE. BUT THE SEVERE EIGHT-YEAR DROUGHT ACROSS THE SAHEL REGION OF AFRICA -- FROM SENEGAL TO ETHIOPIA -- HAS SEVERELY CRIPPLED CHAD'S AGRICULTURAL OUTPUT AND GREATLY CONTRIBUTED TO THE IMPOVERISHMENT OF ITS PEOPLE.

TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE, CHAD IS PLAGUED BY REBEL GROUPS IN ITS NORTHERN AND EASTERN REGIONS, WHICH NOW THREATEN TO BREAK UP THE COUNTRY. CHAD'S POLITICAL TROUBLES ARE A REFLECTION OF DEEP-ROOTED REGIONAL DIFFERENCES THAT EXISTED PRIOR TO THE EUROPEAN COLONIAL ERA. WHEN FRANCE AND GREAT BRITAIN CARVED UP COLONIES IN CENTRAL AFRICA IN THE LATE 1800'S, THE PEOPLE OF THE ISLAMIC KINGDOMS IN NORTH AND EAST PRESENT-DAY CHAD FOUND THEMSELVES PART OF THE SAME POLITICAL ENTITY AS THEIR FORMER SLAVES AND SERVANTS, THE SARA TRIBES TO THE SOUTH. TODAY CHAD IS DIVIDED BETWEEN THE MOSLEMS IN THE NORTH AND ANIMIST-CHRISTIAN GROUPS IN THE SOUTH.

THE CHAD GOVERNMENT CLAIMS THAT THE REBEL GROUPS ARE BEING SUPPORTED BY ITS NORTHERN NEIGHBOR LIBYA WITH BOTH ARMS AND

MONEY. AND NEWS REPORTS SAY THAT CHAD'S NORTHERN TRIANGLE -- WITH ITS REPORTEDLY RICH URANIUM DEPOSITS -- HAS NOW BEEN VIRTUALLY ANNEXED BY LIBYA. AT THE SAME TIME, CHAD OFFICIALS CLAIM THAT THE LOSS OF NORTHERN CHAD TO LIBYA IS PART OF A SOVIET-INSPIRED PLAN OF DESTABILIZATION IN CENTRAL AFRICA.

MEANWHILE, CHAD'S EASTERN REGION ALONG THE SUDANESE BORDER IS SAID TO BE CONTROLLED BY OTHER MOSLEM REBELS. THIS LEAVES ONLY THE SOUTHERN-MOST PART OF THE COUNTRY IN FIRM GOVERNMENT CONTROL. THE LARGELY NON-MOSLEM AREA HOLDS A MAJORITY OF CHAD'S POPULATION AND IS BY FAR ITS MOST IMPORTANT AGRICULTURAL REGION.

(OPT) WHILE IN THE PAST FRENCH TROOPS HAVE FOUGHT ALONGSIDE CHAD FORCES AGAINST THE REBELS, THEY NOW REMAIN IN CHAD ONLY AS ADVISORS, TRAINING THE CHAD ARMY AND MAINTAINING ITS EQUIPMENT. FRANCE ALSO PAYS ITS FORMER COLONY AN ANNUAL SUBSIDY EQUAL TO THIRTY PERCENT OF CHAD'S BUDGET. (END OPT)

THIS WEEK, DEVELOPMENTS TOOK ON GREATER INTERNATIONAL IMPLICATIONS WHEN CHAD SUSPENDED DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH LIBYA. IT ACCUSED ITS NORTHERN NEIGHBOR OF OCCUPYING A LARGE PORTION OF ITS TERRITORY AND SUPPORTING THE ANTI-GOVERNMENT REBELS AND WEDNESDAY (FEBRUARY 8) CHAD'S PRESIDENT FELIX MALLOUM URGED ITS NEIGHBORS AND THE WESTERN COUNTRIES TO AID HIS GOVERNMENT MILITARILY IN COUNTERING WHAT HE CALLED THE "MARKED AGGRESSION FROM LIBYA".

JS/PY